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# AIR FORCE AND DIVERSITY: THE AWKWARD EMBRACE

by

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## Biography

  Lieutenant Colonel Suzanne Streeter is a U.S. Air Force intelligence officer assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL.  She graduated from the United States Air Force Academy in 1992 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Western European history, Middlebury College in 1994 with a Masters of Arts in French Culture, Literature and Civilization, and Naval Postgraduate School in 2006 with a Masters of Arts in National Security Affairs with an emphasis on Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.  She has served at the Air Staff and is a graduated squadron commander.  She serves on the Board of Directors for AcademyWomen, a non-profit organization that addresses issues facing women officers, regardless of their commissioning source.

# Abstract

Attitudes towards diversity in the Air Force range widely; some Airmen perceive diversity as an assault on unit culture or dismiss the need for further attention to diversity, believing all issues were resolved with integration. These attitudes demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of the Air Force's guidance on diversity, which is stated clearly in Air Force Instruction 1-1 as "a military necessity." They contribute to the resulting discordance between Air Force intentions and effective programs and policies to retain and develop a diverse corps. This is evidenced by the alarming rate at which Air Force officer women decide to leave the military, as 50 percent have separated by the 7-year mark; approximately 30 percent of the officer men have separated at the same juncture. Rarely do Airmen actually embrace diversity as key to greater mission success.

There are several steps that can help reverse the retention trends. First, the Air Force needs a clear-eyed understanding of the diversity challenges that lie ahead and the importance of diversity to the mission and to the health of the force. Second, an evaluation of Air Force diversity efforts to date will reveal needed areas for improvement. Third, recommended policy and program changes, like breaks-in-service and focused mentoring plans, will help develop and retain competent officers. Senior leadership advocacy is needed over many years, to ensure the right resources, policies, programs and culture are in place to build the diverse Air Force necessary to tackle increasingly complex mission sets.

# Introduction

The Air Force is pursuing diversity as a mission imperative, recognizing that individuals who think alike might not resolve future complex problem-sets.[1]  These challenges range from resolving an intelligence problem at the tactical level, developing a campaign plan against a near peer competitor at the operational level or creating policies at the strategic level.  However, despite recent efforts to integrate diversity measures into Air Force culture, including 2012 Air Force Instructions codifying "diversity [as] a military necessity," most Airmen are more likely to view "diversity" as another top-down initiative, accompanied by computer-based training, checklists, and rules-based compliance, rather than recognizing diversity as a game-changer for the Air Force.[2]  Even those who discern that diversity is important for the mission are often unable to articulate why this is so.  The few who realize that diversity is important, or recognize group-think in their inner circle, do so often late in their career.[3]

Discordance exists between Air Force intentions vis-à-vis diversity and any effective programs and policies to retain and develop a diverse senior leadership cadre.  Challenges lie ahead for the Air Force, from the retention of key demographic populations to inculcating diversity's importance to mission success.  The Air Force has initiated formal diversity efforts; nevertheless, there are recommended policy and development programs that may help develop and retain competent officers.  These issues and solutions will be examined in the following pages, with a specific focus on officer women due to the paper's limited scope.  Bottom-line, building a diverse Air Force leadership team—in this case, by retaining its officer women—must be a persistent leadership effort.

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# The Air Force's Diversity Challenge

*Groupthink is the worst thing you can have when you have a problem…If there are all male Caucasians sitting around the table, you have groupthink.*
- General Philip M. Breedlove, USAF
Tuskegee Airmen's 40th National Conference

The Air Force proudly touts its diversity numbers, with 18.9 percent of the overall active duty force comprised of women and about 27 percent of its members derived from minority populations.[4]  However, the Air Force's long-term retention of these individuals, particularly female junior officers, is problematic (see figures 1-3).  As of 2008, the Air Force's officer women retention rate was about 50 percent at about the 7-year mark, whereas the men met this milestone at about the 12-year mark; after 12 years of service, women's attrition rate was 70 percent.[5]  Officer men do not reach this level of attrition until the 21-year mark.  As indicated by the statistics listed below, female line-officer O-6s are conspicuously small in number (line-officers are the backbone of the Air Force's senior leadership cadre as Group and Wing Commanders, Center directors, and General Officers; see appendix A for more demographic charts).  As of 2008, 85 percent of all general officers were white males.[6]
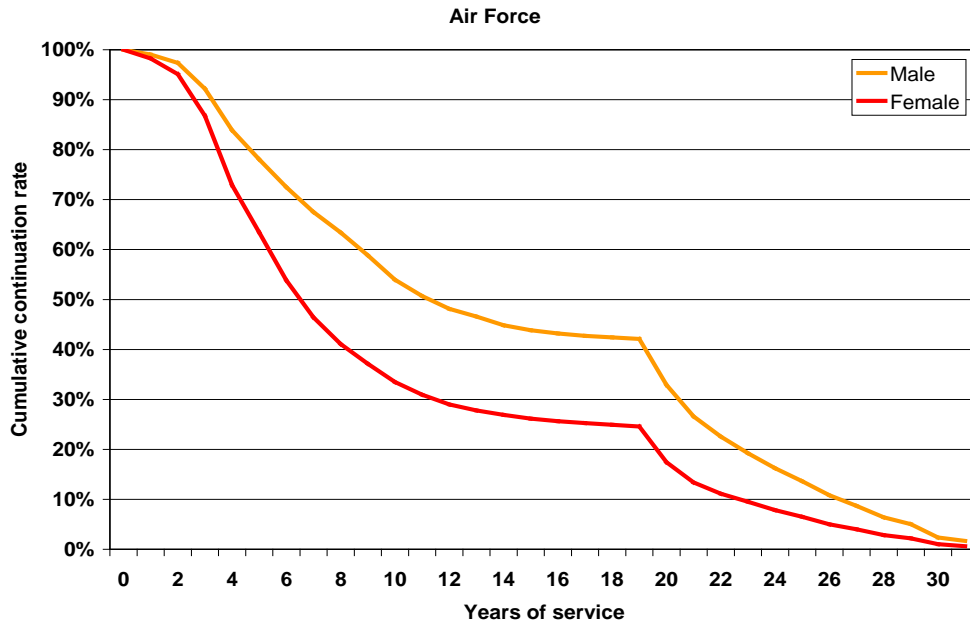
**Air Force**



**Figure 1: Air Force Military Officer Attrition.** (Reprinted from Military Leadership Diversity Commission's *Issue Paper #24: Officer Retention Rates across the Services*, 4.)
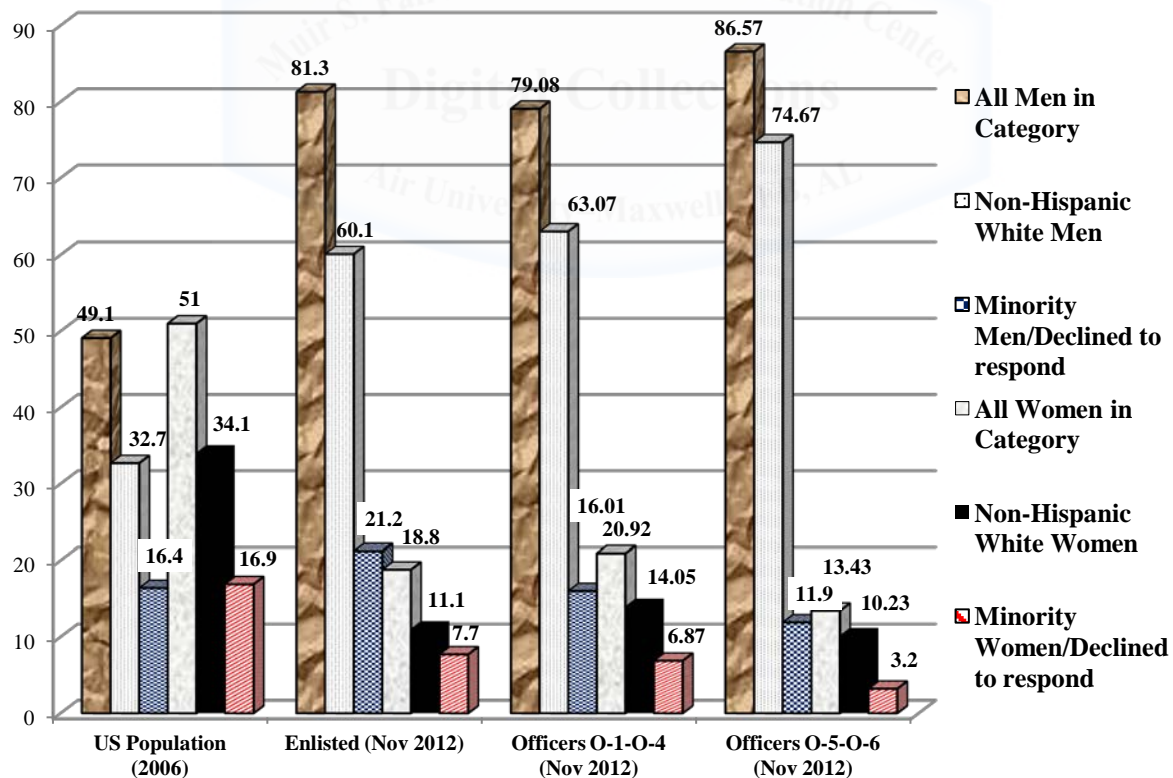


**Figure 2: Gender and Minority Status Distribution vs. 85 percent of Air Force General Officers as Non-Hispanic White Men.** (Adapted from US Census Bureau, 2006; and author's compilation of data from AFPC IDEAS application, November 2012.)
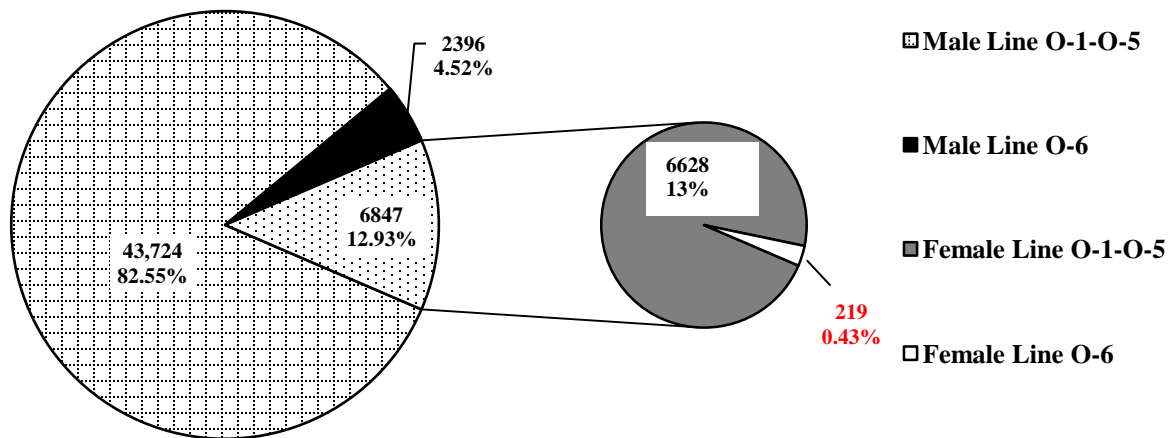
3

**Figure 3: Line Officers Broken Down by Gender (November 2012).**
(Author's compilation of data from AFPC IDEAS application, November 2012 data.)

## Diversity – Meaning and Importance

The Air Force has designated diversity as an institutional competency, which means it is "expected of all Airmen, throughout their careers, and…needed to operate successfully in the constantly changing environment in which they function."[7] This particular institutional competency is defined as "a composite of…personal life experiences, geographic background, socioeconomic background, cultural knowledge, educational background, work background, language abilities, physical abilities, philosophical/spiritual perspectives, age, race, ethnicity, and gender."[8] In June 2012, the Air Force acknowledged that "diversity is a leadership issue" and that leaders should develop "Airmen with different backgrounds and perspectives so [that] they continue to grow and thrive in the Air Force" because diversity "enhances mission readiness and is a national security imperative."[9] In July 2011, former Chief of Staff of the Air Force Schwartz asserted, "diversity should not be an end unto itself, but rather one of the means toward our broader desired state of enhanced effectiveness as an Air Force."[10] In spite of these strategic

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words, the Air Force has not presented a clear case for how diversity improves mission readiness and national security, nor has it addressed how those at the operational and tactical levels should leverage diversity to enhance their mission success.

There are many reasons why diversity is important to mission readiness and national security. These include: demographically representative leadership, enhanced civil-military relations with a diverse civil society, and leveraging diversity as a demographic mission necessity. The paragraphs below provide further discussion of these benefits.

**Representative Leadership**

The Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC) found that "officers were generally less demographically diverse than both the enlisted troops they led and the civilian population they served."[11] This could lead to "invisible privilege," which describes a condition in which a dominant group cannot comprehend those who do not fit the "norm" of that culture. A relatively homogeneous senior leadership cadre can be more prone to "blind spots" in their dealings with the diverse enlisted corps and relatively diverse junior officer corps-- not fully understanding what will resonate with these populations.[12] As an example, in developing retention policies for women, current retention efforts focused on monetary carrots do not necessarily reflect measures that will entice women to stay. In fact, in a 2002 survey, only four percent of women cited "pay and allowances as a critical factor to separate from the active duty Air Force;" other reasons honed in on family and leadership issues.[13] The military is the one of the few US workplaces where women are paid equally as their male counterparts for doing the same job.[14] This equal pay factor might not cross the mind of senior leaders who focus primarily on fiscally-oriented retention efforts.[15]

**Civil-Military Relations**

Relative homogeneity in the senior officer corps also has implications for civil-military relations, with respect to political leadership and the broader civilian society. As former House Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton (D-Mo.) warned, "those who protect us are psychologically divorced from those who are being protected."[16] Throughout history, there has been tension between military and civilian leadership. Increasing divergence in the attitudes of the Air Force and political leadership is foreseeable if the Air Force senior leadership cadre stays mostly homogenous (since a reduced presence of military veteran lawmakers will continue to be the trend). This has ramifications for not only garnering support for Air Force program requirements within Congress but also resonating with the general public when articulating the Air Force's raison d'être.

**Diversity and Military Necessity**

Diverse teams are better than non-diverse teams at solving complex problem sets, which can lead to mission success.[17] Indeed, cognitive diversity—thinking differently[18]—has enabled "diverse groups of problem solvers…[to have] consistently outperformed groups of the best and brightest."[19] There are several studies of the civilian workforce which suggest that gender diversity at the senior levels helps companies during a recession. One 2012 report studying 2,360 world-wide companies from 2005-2011 demonstrated that "large-cap stock" companies (those making 10 billion dollars annually) with at least one woman on their board "outperformed those without women board members by 26%."[20] This success was attributed to wide-ranging characteristics from "better mix of leadership skills" to "risk aversion," especially in a volatile market.[21] Gender diversity will not automatically equate to success, due to institutional biases[22] or poorly implemented diversity programs.[23]

In the military, there are no wide-range studies examining if gender-diverse teams resolve complex problem sets better than non-diverse teams.[24] However, women are increasingly necessary to conduct military missions. For example, male military personnel could not interact with Afghan women without violating cultural taboos. Marine Female Engagement Teams and Special Forces Cultural Support Teams established in response to this challenge led to unexpected benefits in addition to gaining valuable intelligence. These benefits include expanded impact since women "have considerable influence on their husbands, children and their community as a whole."[25] General Dempsey recognized this fact in January 2013 when he pushed for the lifting of the women's combat ban; he assessed that "ultimately, we're acting to strengthen the joint force."[26] Not only have women been increasingly integrated in operations downrange but there is also a need for women to fill positions as fewer youth are available to meet military requirements. Only 15 percent of the US "youth population…are [eligible and] available to serve in the military."[27]

## Moving Toward Leadership Diversity

Laura Liswood noted in *The Loudest Duck*: "we need to get beyond the brick and mortar of diversity…the committees, employee networks, and the training…all these are necessary but not sufficient."[28] She astutely observed that "diverse organizations require sophisticated leadership…to reap the benefits of what true diversity can provide."[29] Liswood goes on to describe most corporations' approach to diversity as one of "Noah's Ark," in which accession is the main focus for measuring diversity's success, but there are often no effective programs to retain these minorities; even designed training can be counterproductive and the "unconscious handling of diversity can lead to diverse groups leaving."[30] As will be shown below, this is the case for the Air Force as well.

**Air Force Diversity Strategic Roadmap**

The Air Force has focused much of its effort on gaining diversity via accession. Female officer accession rates have averaged at the 24 percent mark (FY1997-2011).[31] However, the average female percentage of the overall officer corps over the same timeframe remained at an average 17.83 percent.[32] Given these facts, the focus will remain on Air Force diversity efforts beyond accession. These efforts include three of the five 2012 Diversity Strategic Roadmap priorities focused on developing and retaining a diverse force: "institutionalize diversity;" "develop a high-quality, talented and diverse total force;" and "retain a high-quality, talented and diverse total force."[33] The planned actions to execute these goals have not gone far enough to ensure that Airmen understand how and why diversity is a critical part of solving complex problem sets.

The first priority is to "institutionalize diversity as necessary to mission success." Institutionalizing diversity as a mission necessity will be a multi-year and complex effort, requiring persistent leadership efforts to communicate basic awareness (see figure 4). The next steps of influencing attitudes and changing beliefs—thereby evolving Air Force culture—will require even more dedicated attention and time. Efforts should include reviewing and changing policies to ensure the Air Force does not "[run] the risk of perpetuating the idea that organization members must always adjust to the organization, rather than the organization at non-mission-essential times adjusting to the diverse needs of its members."[34]
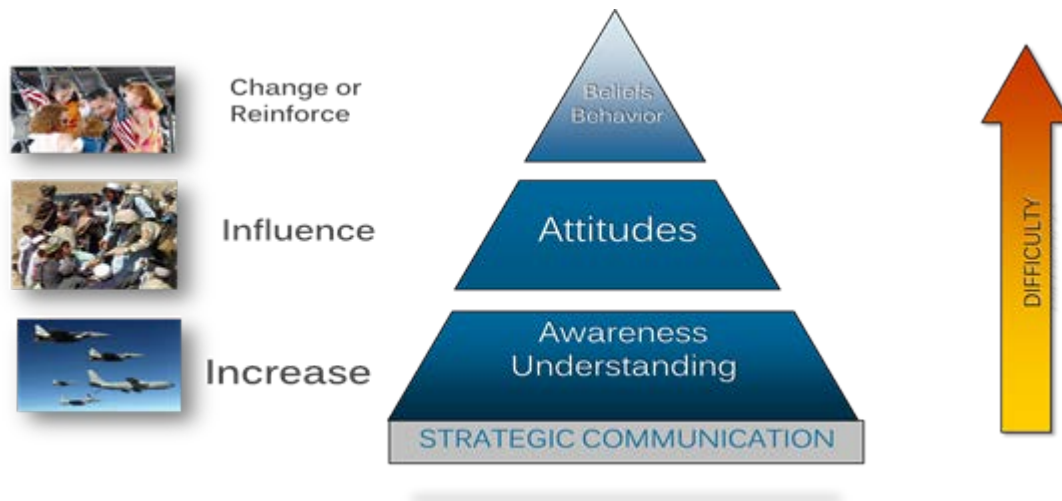
**Figure 4:  Strategic Communication Desired Effects.**  (Reprinted from USAF Public Affairs Center of Excellence, 2012.)

Current goals and actions focus mostly on Airmen feeling included instead of focusing on institutionalizing why and how diversity is necessary to mission success.[35]  These actions include creating the Air Force Diversity Committee, major command-level diversity focus groups and Air Force-wide guidance via the latest Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-7001.[36]  Inclusion is important, as "without an awareness of the cultural diversity of one's organization and the needs of different cultural groups, it is difficult to achieve an inclusive culture where members feel like they belong and believe they can succeed" (and stay).[37]  Nonetheless, a backlash might emerge from the dominant population if the Air Force over-focuses on inclusion and not diversity's importance since "framing social inequalities only in the context of the disadvantaged out-group encourages prejudicial attitudes by privileged group members."[38]  There are several examples of this kind of reaction within the Air Force that fall under the realm of the Equal Opportunity Office.[39]  In order for diversity to succeed, it needs to be complementary but "remain separate and distinct from, Air Force Equal Opportunity (EO) compliance programs and activities" as stated in AFI 36-7001.[40]  The EO office is regarded by most as a resource used when inclusion

(or one might say "tolerance") fails; therefore, relating diversity to an office associated with social ills would inhibit its evolution into a value completely embraced by the Air Force.[41]

The 2012 strategic plan's second priority is to "develop a high-quality, talented and diverse total force (active duty, Guard, Reserve and civilians)."[42] The 2012 plan has the right view of ensuring the infusion of diversity and inclusion into many avenues of training and education. As mentioned before, diversity cannot be reduced to a computer-based ancillary training that involves individuals quickly clicking through to gain their annual certificate. The Headquarters Air Force Global Diversity Division[43] is researching ways to implement a new learning framework following the 70-20-10 model created by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) and adapted by Princeton University, which proposes that only 10 percent of students learn from "formal training" with 70 percent learning "from real life and on-the-job experiences, tasks and problem solving" and about 20 percent "from feedback and from observing and working with role models."[44] The Squadron Officer College leadership department is implementing a 70-20-10 approach via a leadership elective leveraging Second Life, an on-line avatar-based program.[45] However, there are no fully-developed 70-20-10-based diversity education programs across any Air Force officer professional education programs.[46]

The 2012 strategic plan advocates mentoring as a path to "effectively operate in a global environment.[47] The Air Force has had an on-line mentoring program since 2009.[48] This program could be a great complementary tool as it allows mentors to see their protégés' official personnel records but pre-supposes that mentors have access to the Air Force Portal and that protégés seeking mentors are comfortable asking a senior officer to be a mentor. A 2011 Women in International Security report stated that there was a "direct correlation between mentorship and professional advancement" but that most government agencies "do not devote

enough resources toward ensuring that existing programs are effective."[49]  As such, the Air

Force could consider instead a program like the OfficerWomen eMentor Program, which is

focused on developing female officers and veterans.[50]  In it, a female officer can seek out a

specific mentor or join a forum to discuss issues like being in a dual-military couple, how to

efficiently regain flight qualifications after giving birth, lactation in the workplace or general

career advice.[51]  This program has had measurable results with a sister service.  The Navy

contracted with AcademyWomen for a 3-year pilot eMentor program for all uniformed female

sailors (officers and enlisted).  Eighty-two percent of survey participants who reached a retention

decision while in the program elected to remain in uniform, and 67 percent of these retained

members reported that program participation "positively impacted their decision" to stay in

uniform.[52]  This latter group represented 45 enlisted and 15 female officers in the program who

elected to stay, translating to an estimated 4.35 million dollar savings to the Navy.[53]

Informal mentoring is the more traditional route, whether at work or at events like the

"Women in the Air Force" Symposium mentioned in the 2010 Diversity Strategic Roadmap.[54]

Low-cost mentoring opportunities include women-specific quarterly lunches or hosting webinars

with senior air force women leaders; webinars are already an avenue for certain development

teams to convey data to their career fields, so the foundation is already in place.  Finally, the Air

Force could include training for senior officers mentoring junior officers of different races and

genders.  This training would include various approaches to interact and develop different

personalities, genders, orientations, and cultures and could address concerns that "those in the

dominant group often fear that they will have to be politically correct, avoid giving critical

feedback…[and] accept compromised performance."[55]

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The third relevant priority from the 2012 Diversity Strategic Roadmap is to "retain a high-quality, talented diverse total force."[56] The Air Force has taken concrete steps since the inaugural 2010 Diversity Strategic Roadmap to achieve this goal.[57] Nevertheless, the efforts to "achieve an inclusive environment that provides the total force with the opportunity to realize their full potential" should extend beyond surveys and tracking of quantitative performance measures.[58] It should also expand the Air Force culture to ensure a well-rounded, mission-competent diverse force, including a diverse senior leader cadre. There are still too few measurable goals in the roadmap to indicate whether the Air Force is succeeding in this endeavor.[59] Indeed, as Samuels and Samuels pointed out:

> Even with the best of intentions, it is common to make surface-level, often cosmetic, changes in the hope of alleviating the problem…since leaders do not believe there is any underlying problem in situations like these, they see no need to make any underlying changes. Thus, they may release public statements pointing to successes they have accomplished in these domains, add a statement about being an equal-opportunity employer in their recruitment advertisements, or put women and people of color into their training films.[60]

The Air Force will stagnate in its diversity efforts without an in-depth review and overhaul of personnel policies and systems. The following recommendations, and those aforementioned in Air Force Diversity Strategic Roadmap assessment, indicate potential solutions to achieve the roadmap's aspirations—policy transformation and program development leading to a stronger force.

## Recommendations

**Policy changes**

Previous policy recommendations to mitigate women officer retention issues include home-basing, sabbatical programs and a more flexible continuum of service (see Table 1).[61] These recommendations are still valid today as they accommodate the more non-linear career

paths increasingly reflected in the corporate world among men and women. However, these

recommendations have not been fully implemented by the Air Force; they require Chief of Staff

of the Air Force and Congressional-level action. These programs would not only retain women,

but also key skills-sets and cognitive diversity across the force.

**Table 1: Reasons for Leaving the Air Force (2002 Data)**

| Reasons for Leaving the Air Force | % Critical/Significant Factor | % Not a Factor |
|---|---|---|
| Start a family | 24 | 60 |
| Stay home with children | 27 | 61 |
| Spend more time with family | 41 | 40 |
| Child care | 8 | 80 |
| Civilian jobs (more money) | 12 | 67 |
| Civilian jobs (more fulfilling work) | 20 | 61 |
| Civilian jobs (move ahead) | 12 | 72 |
| Civilian jobs (better cultural climate) | 11 | 70 |
| Geographic stability | 41 | 42 |
| Dissatisfied with AF leadership | 27 | 42 |

*Reprinted from* DiSilverio, *Winning the Retention Wars*, 30.

The first proposed solution instituted home basing as an option, which is defined as

"assigning a military member to the same base or location for an extended period of time."[62] In

August 2001, the Government Accountability Office pointed out that more time between moves

led to more likelihood of retention across the board, 60-64 percent for 3-plus year tours as

opposed to 46 percent for 2-3 year tours (the average was 2-year tours).[63] The Air Force slashed

the number of moves in 2006, with the main goal of saving funds by keeping individuals on

station for an average of four years (saving about 134 million dollars annually).[64] An

unimplemented proposal included more extensive home-basing for officers, up to 8-10 years;

this initiative allowed junior officers to "to develop roots in a community and a support network" and minimize the disruption of frequent moves.[65]  Today a viable option is to expand the current PCS policy, which allows selected enlisted members to volunteer for hard-to-fill spots via the Voluntary Stabilized Base Assignment Program for five years at a time.[66]  For officers, a home-basing program is easier to implement in locations like Colorado Springs, San Antonio or Washington DC, as there are more lateral and vertical openings.  This initiative could retain those individuals who would otherwise separate for reasons of geographic stability, as well as reduce moving costs in this era of austerity.  The Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) would have to gauge the size of the program but this could be a lottery-based program, to keep the numbers at a manageable level to account for mission needs.

A second recommendation included a "non-punitive break in service option as a retention tool."[67]  Earlier proposed, unimplemented solutions included a "one-year paid sabbatical" and a one to five-year unpaid break-in-service; each option would allow personnel to return as valued assets to the Air Force, saving training funds in the long run.[68]  The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for 2009 authorized each service to "carry out pilot programs under which officers and enlisted members of the regular components of the Armed Forces…may be inactivated from active duty in order to meet personal or professional needs and returned to active duty."[69]  Congress authorized "20 officers and 20 enlisted members of each Armed Force" per year, for a maximum of three years.[70]  In the 2012 NDAA, Congress extended the program to the end of calendar year 2015.[71]  However, the Navy has been the only Department of Defense (DOD) service to take advantage of this program.  Entitled the "Career Intermission Pilot Program," this once-in-a career program includes full health care and a small stipend for participants.[72]  The Air Force should follow the Navy's lead in establishing a career intermission

pilot program of its own; it is within the Secretary of the Air Force's power to establish this program and in the long run, would not be that expensive to implement. The Air Force could also examine the Coast Guard's TEMPSEP program, which has been activated since Fiscal Year 2001.[73] The Coast Guard re-dedicated support to the program in September 2012 as a "retention tool" and an option for personnel when making life-changing decisions.[74] Though the Coast Guard falls under Title 14 and as such is not bound by NDAA restrictions, there could be some practices from which the Air Force could benchmark. If well-integrated, a break-in-service would not be punitive to an individual's career; there is no reason why a program participant should not attain senior officer status as their "outside" experience could inject even more cognitive diversity.[75]

A third recommendation includes increasing the "permeability of [the] Active-Reserve barrier."[76] This kind of policy change is needed more than ever. The Air Force designed the 3-1 Integration Plan to allow the three components of the Air Force to combine their personnel systems, thus allowing for a true continuum of service.[77] This plan was shelved, for reasons unknown to the author. However, the Army initiated its continuum of service program in 2012, which shows great promise. According to the Army Reserve 2012 Posture Statement, the goal is to "inspire Soldiers to a lifetime of military service, which includes seamless transitions between active and reserve statuses."[78] If the plan unfolds as intended, a soldier could take several paths, including a mix of reserve status and also active-reserve.[79] It behooves the Air Force to track the outcome of the Army program and re-consider the shelved 3-1 Integration Plan.

**Developing a diverse force**

The Air Force should create solid development programs to inculcate diversity as a force multiplier; pursuing surface-level diversity can be counter-productive. Women put into key

positions based solely on gender, and not based on training or competence, may be more likely to fail and create or reinforce negative perceptions. Another potential fall-out is that these individuals would not get the critical feedback they need to grow as leaders. Action plans should be sensitive to these factors and prepare leaders to develop their entire officer corps' core competencies so all can step up confidently to the leadership positions when chosen.

Intervention to inculcate diversity into the Air Force culture should be implemented incrementally. One way to approach the 2012 Diversity Strategic Roadmap's institutionalization priority is to link diversity to mission effectiveness at every turn in the field. This reinforcement could be woven into opportunities found in mentoring, officer professional development sessions and wingman days. An initial focus, for example, is for Airmen to uncover their own misperceptions or implicit biases about officer women (or minorities);[80] there are free surveys like the Harvard Implicit Association Test, which measures subconscious biases via a simple on-line test.[81] Other activities could leverage case studies from free web sites like Stanford Business Graduate School "Leadership in Focus."[82] These programs could include a concerted effort to develop technical and leadership competencies in all Airmen.[83]

**Surveys**

The Air Force is on the right track with future survey topics, such as an upcoming survey focused on reasons why women leave active duty.[84] However, this effort could be expanded to include crowdsourcing techniques. That is, instead of a snapshot in time of quantitative data, make this a living source for the Air Force, in which members provide reasons why officer women leave and also potential solutions. Not all reasons would be feasible, but widen the aperture for senior leadership to develop better retention policies.

Additional data snapshots would also be useful, such as expanding the 2012 Diversity Strategic Roadmap performance measurement of "track[ing] the number/percentage of supervisory total force personnel who indicate…they are serving as a mentor" to include questions as to who they are mentoring and why.[85]  The survey could include a hyperlink to mentoring resources.  Another method to capture how diversity is being inculcated into the culture would be to include questions on diversity as it relates to mission effectiveness in unit climate assessment surveys; current questions dealing with inter-relationships tend to be focused on EO-type issues.  The Air Force should also consider publicly tracking attrition rates of stressed career fields like intelligence or cyber—at this time it only publishes a thorough analysis of the attrition rates of pilots, navigators and air battle managers in its annual Rated Officer Retention Analysis; it is difficult to understand why individuals are leaving if the numbers are not analyzed and published.

**Avatars**

The work started by the Squadron Officer College using avatars could expand to introduce diversity in a way that reaches the younger generation.  Imagine a simulation in which an officer role-plays a minority or a woman via an on-line avatar, encountering some of the implicit biases or challenges.  This will not necessarily change attitudes right away but could plant some seeds of empathy.  Another option with this technology would be to develop scenarios in which players encounter realistic, complex problems which can only be solved if the virtual team is diverse.[86]

## Conclusions and Areas for Future Research

This paper addressed the Air Force's recognition of diversity as a critical mission element, and has expanded upon why and how there is a divergence between policy and reality

when it comes to officer women retention.  First, many within the Air Force do not consider diversity as a factor when creating their operational teams or solving complex problems, no matter what surveys state regarding how Airmen recognize the importance of diversity.[87] Second, current personnel policies are not necessarily conducive to retention.  The 2012 Diversity Strategic Roadmap recognizes this fact, and it has outlined actions to accommodate these values.  Third, while the Air Force has created groups to discuss diversity, programs that develop a diverse force are limited, especially in the education and mentoring fields.  The Air Force should consider strategic-level tracks to close this gap on officer women retention.  The first is to pursue policy changes at the Headquarters Air Force and Congressional levels.  The second, probably more time-consuming and leadership-intensive path, is to move beyond rhetoric and a culture in which officer women leaders are a normative part of achieving mission success.

The Headquarters Air Force Global Diversity Division, which is charged with developing diversity policy and programs, is committed to resolving the aforementioned challenges.  However, a small office of five permanent party members is not enough to turn the tide of Air Force culture.  Its personnel need assistance from both Air Force senior leadership and from the field to create excitement about diversity.

The area that needs most research and work is in developing effective programs.  The objective is to move the Air Force beyond the guidance, talking points and static web sites, which all operate via a pull versus a push methodology.  Furthermore, there are lots of speeches by Senior Leaders given to niche audiences like National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) or Congress, but it is not clear how their words are translated to action.  These programs should focus on those in the field, but also reiterate the lessons at every

educational opportunity, from accession programs to professional military education.  Another area for further research would be to introduce leadership from the middle.[88]  That is, train a specific cadre of individuals on diversity to develop a peer cadre, much like the Air Force does now for resiliency.  Finally, as Samuels and Samuels stated, "a framework is needed to help leaders become more culturally aware of other organizational members' experiences and needs…to highlight the manner in which the statuses of leaders might serve as blinders and even inhibitors to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace."[89]

Transforming culture is a difficult endeavor.  While the Air Force has taken great strides to initiate this change, it will take at least a generation of consistent senior leadership involvement and purposeful policies and programs to make diversity a true Air Force competency.  The steps that the Air Force takes in the next few years will make all the difference for the retention and development of diverse individuals.  More important, however, is to change the attitude of the entire force to truly embrace diversity as a force-multiplier in dealing with increasingly complex problems.

**Appendix A: Demographic Charts**

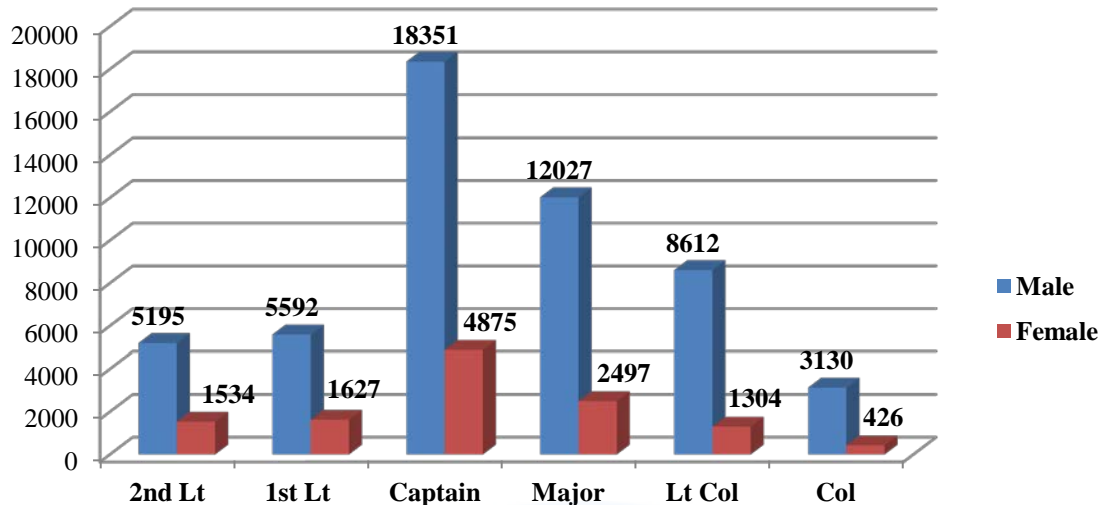The following charts depict different ways of examining the male-female officer makeup of the Air Force.



**Figure A1: Officer Break-down by Raw Numbers (September 2011 data).**
(Adapted from "The Air Force in Facts and Figures: 2012 Almanac," 40.)
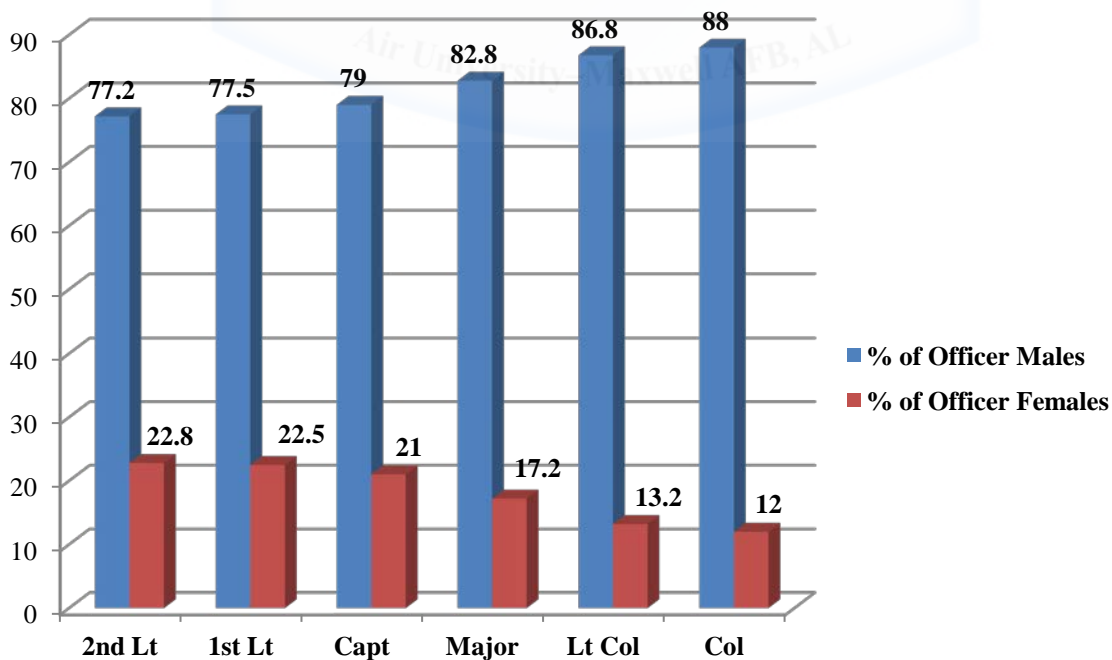


**Figure A2: Percentage of Males and Females, within Individual Rank (September 2011 data).** (Adapted from "The Air Force in Facts and Figures: 2012 Almanac," 40.)

**Figure A3: Percentage of Entire Officer Population (Line/Non-line), Broken Down by Rank and Gender (September 2011 data).** (Adapted from "The Air Force in Facts and Figures: 2012 Almanac," 40.)



*Females are 19.2% of entire officer population but female O-6s are only 0.7% (male O-6s are 4.8%)*
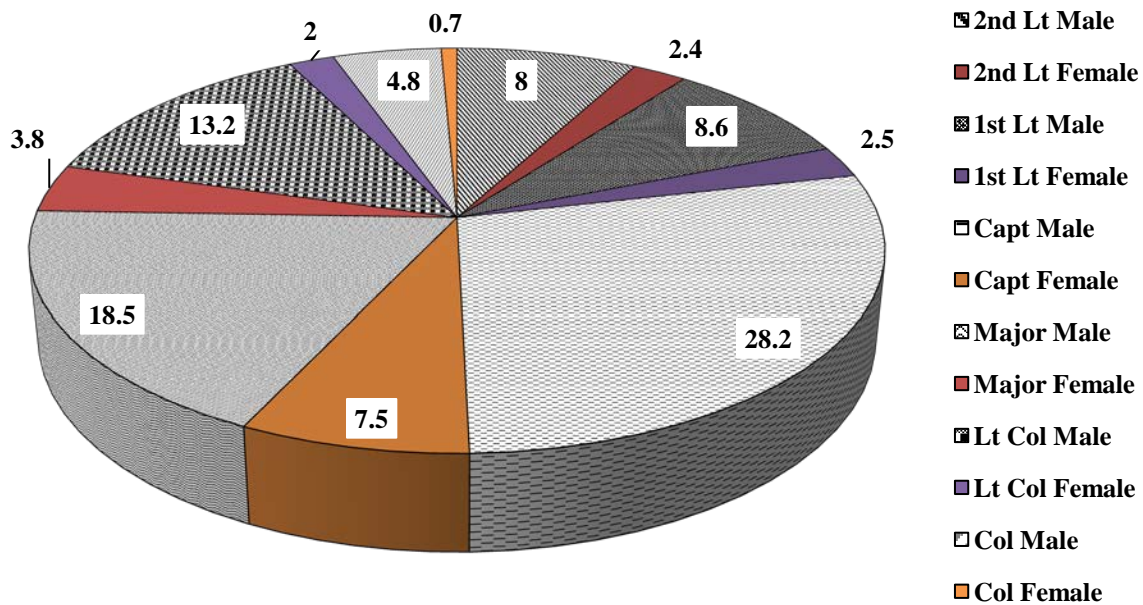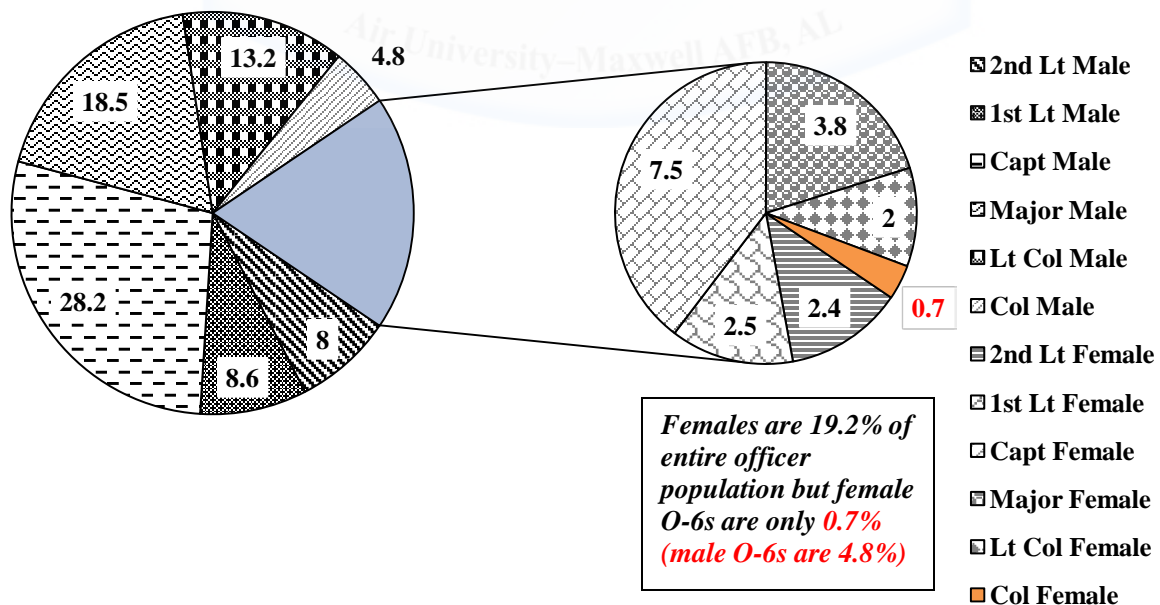
**Figure A4: Percentage of Entire Officer Population (Line/Non-line), Broken Down by Rank and Gender (September 2011 data).** (Adapted from "The Air Force in Facts and Figures: 2012 Almanac," 40.)

**Appendix B:  Officer Accession and Professional Military Education**

Training and education are included as key parts of the development priority mentioned in the 2012 Air Force Diversity Strategic Roadmap.[90]  All in all, while there has been progress made in introducing diversity at various levels of accession and Professional Military Education (PME) programs, there is still work to do.  Officer PME programs are times in an officer's career in which he or she should be receptive to exploring new or different ideas, such as diversity as a mission imperative.   However, training and education needs to go beyond these efforts and as mentioned in the main body of this paper, should be emphasized at every opportunity to link with mission needs.

Increasing awareness and influencing attitudes vis-à-vis diversity starts with officer accession programs.  There have been solid efforts started at the Jeanne M. Holm Center for Officer Accessions and Citizen Development, which oversees all officer accession programs with the exception of the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA).  The Holm Center focuses on introducing the diversity concept to its cadets and officer trainees, specifically via a two-hour lesson entitled "managing diversity," which is focused on the elements and challenges of leading a diverse force, with team-building exercises.  There could be more focus on embracing diversity as mission essential, instead of linking diversity to case studies on how to handle EEO and sexual harassment issues.   While the latter training is essential for the new trainees, there should be caution taken when linking these issues with diversity, as mentioned in the main body of this paper.[91]

USAFA has been the most holistic and dedicated in its approach to diversity.  Though USAFA's focus remains on accessing a more diverse force, it has recognized the need to develop solid action plans to not only diversify its teaching cadre but also train it, to expand opportunities

focused on retention and finally, to put resources behind its efforts. [92]  By early 2011, USAFA

had hired a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) to be in charge of its new Diversity Office, which

works with the Center for Character and Leadership Development on such issues as curriculum

development. [93]  In August 2011, the CDO spent 15,000 dollars to train 200 faculty and

permanent staff on recognizing "diversity filters" which is really the first step in developing not

only awareness but breaking through some of the mental barriers people may not know they

have. [94]  As part of its leadership curriculum, USAFA has included a lesson entitled "Leading

Consciously and Inclusively" which delves deep into why diversity is mission critical, to include

such key items as changing demographics and working with coalition partners. [95]   There is also a

push to increase cross-cultural competencies, to include a pilot program called the "Ambassadors

of Inclusion" which while open to all cadets, is very diverse in participation (of the 10

participating cadets, most were either women or minorities).  This program included visits to 5

different companies.  Finally, there is a women's initiative, which includes "brown bag" lunches

twice per quarter.  There are nevertheless still challenges for USAFA, to include inconsistent

funding sources and ensuring program sustainability. [96]

Of the three main Air Force Officer PME programs, the one geared toward junior officers

(Squadron Officer School) has the most developed program to comply with Air Staff direction.

There is a full 50 minute in-class course focused on introducing the Air Force's diversity

emphasis, as well as a 90 minute teambuilding exercise which touches on diversity as a

consideration for building a team.  As mentioned in the main body of this paper, Dr. Arenas'

work with avatars should be given more attention, especially with the increased possibilities for

diversity education and training. [97]

The Air Command and Staff College, geared towards Majors, has some diversity elements included in its curricula. The most developed is an elective which includes an extensive historical survey of women in the military and addresses challenges and contributions; however there are 12 students enrolled out of 485 in this particular course. In the spring, the "Practice of Command" course will include a 90-minute lecture entitled "leading during social change" which focuses on diversity.[98]

At this time the Air War College does not have any focused topics on diversity within its curricula. Nevertheless, the leadership department is looking into ways to interweave diversity into its Joint Strategic Leadership course as well as its 360 leadership survey for Annual Year 2014's class; this would include administrating the Harvard Implicit Bias test.[99]

# Notes
**(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)**

1.  The author profusely thanks Dr. Kimberly Hudson, Ms. Kimberly Streeter, Colonel Jill Singleton, COL (ret, USA) Gene Kamena, Lieutenant Colonel John Yourse, and Dr Elizabeth Woodworth for their reviews, edits, and frank discussions on this topic. Thanks also to Ms. Kimberly Streeter for her inspiration on the title.

2.  AFI 1-1, *Air Force Culture*, 11.

3.  The 2011 Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC) report stated that "there are potential perceptual barriers that prevent racial/ethnic minorities and women from obtaining key assignments, such as command. In particular, [they] may lack sufficient knowledge about key assignment opportunities, perhaps because [they] do not receive the same counseling or mentoring about key assignments as their white male counterparts." DOD, *From Representation to Inclusion* (2011), 68.

4.  Air Force Personnel Web site, "Air Force Personnel Demographics."

5.  DOD, *Issue Paper #24: Officer Retention Rates across the Services*, 4.

6.  The MLDC's report makes this particular point via its charts. DOD. *From Representation to Inclusion* (2011), 43.

7.  Lane to the author, e-mail; AFPD 36-26, *Total Force Development*, 9, 11.

8.  Air Force Diversity Web site.

9.  AFD 120716-024, *US Air Force Key Talking Points June 2012 Special Edition: Diversity*.

10.  AFD 110728-029, *Remarks by Gen Norty Schwartz, 102nd NAACP Annual Convention Military Awards Dinner*.

11.  DOD, *From Representation to Inclusion* (2011), 44.

12.  Within the Air Force Academy, for example, the normative population is comprised of white Christian males – anybody who does not fit into that category is not necessarily viewed as inherently belonging to that institution and often has to go above and beyond just to justify his/her membership. Without conscious effort or education, dominant groups simply do not realize that others have a different experience or outlook than their own; as Samuels and Samuels stated, "when privilege is normalized, those in dominant positions tend not to see themselves as privileged and thus run the risk of ignoring their own role in perpetuating inequalities" or inadvertently "distance themselves from their goals." Samuels and Samuels, "Incorporating the Concept of Privilege into Policy and Practice," 325-326.

13.  In 2002, Lt Col DiSilverio conducted a survey for her Air War College research paper which included this data. She went on to state that "the Air Force can focus its retention efforts on decreasing the conflict between having/caring for families and fulfilling military duties rather than on making the military look attractive in comparison to civilian opportunities. The Air Force has historically been focused on the latter." DiSilverio, *Winning the Retention Wars*, 36.

14.  This is not to say that women are promoted at the same rate. The MLDC made it clear that there was a gap, especially in the USCG and Navy. These are due to any number of potential reasons, to include not as competitively written performance reports and assignment matching, but not necessarily due to promotion boards, which work under very clear direction as to what is expected. MLDC, *From Representation to Inclusion* (2011), 76-78.

15.  With the millennial generation forming the junior officer ranks, monetary reasons are not necessarily incentives to stay; a 2011 survey of junior officers stated that 75 percent of those

surveyed claimed "personnel management issues" and 57 percent stated "the limited ability to control their own careers" were their respective reasons for leaving the military.  This was a survey of 250 junior officers, mostly Marines and Army and 86 percent male.  Though only four percent of those surveyed were Air Force, the generational tendencies are probably similar.  Falk and Rogers, *Junior Military Officer Retention*, 11, 53.

16.  Ewing, "Defense leaders fear military-civilian 'disconnect.'"

17.  There are several examples in the civilian world, such as computer gamers who mapped the complex molecular structure of a retrovirus enzyme that perplexed trained scientists for years.  Also, Yahoo! CEO Marissa Mayer, instituted innovative ways to introduce more flexible working arrangements to help both men and women in this high stress, male-dominated environment find some semblance of a family life, thereby retaining key talent.  University of Washington, "Gamers Succeed Where Scientists Fail;" Rosin, "Female Tech Leaders Solving the Family Conundrum."

18.  For this paper, cognitive diversity includes identity diversity.  That is, the socialization of US society (and especially the military) fits firmly in the masculine quadrant of any chart made by Hofstede and Hofstede in *Cultures and Organizations*.  In a masculine society, male and female "emotional gender roles are clearly distinct;" masculine values such as work earnings and recognition are more esteemed than values found in feminine society, such as more importance on "relationships and quality of life."  Due to this typical socialization in American society, women tend to also be cognitively diverse (thinking differently) due to their identity diversity.  Hofstede and Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations,* 140-141,151-152, 155.

19.  Dr Scott Page is among several academics who argue this to be true.  Page, alluding to Steiner states that diversity is necessary for "conjunctive tasks, those in which everyone's contribution is critical."  He also stated in *The Difference* that while identity diversity does not automatically translate to success, he does acknowledge that when linked to cognitive diversity and issues that require diverse thought, "identity diversity produces better outcomes indirectly."  The argument could be made that this holds especially true in the case of the military – its leaders and many junior officers are tasked to resolve complex problems which need innovative solutions.  Page, *The Difference*, xv, xxv-xxvi, 13.

20.  Credit Suisse Research, *Gender Diversity and Corporate Performance*, 12.

21.  Ibid., *Gender Diversity and Corporate Performance*, 18-19.

22.  Dobbin and Jung stated in their study that "The fact that board diversity has no effect on profits, but a negative effect on stock price, lends support to our thesis that institutional investors may sell the stock of firms that appoint women to their boards—not because profits suffer, but because they are biased against women."  Dobbin and Jung, "Corporate Board Gender Diversity and Stock Performance *Bias*?," 828.

23.  As the MLDC stated, "if not managed effectively, diversity…can actually reduce capability, most frequently through the decreased communication and/or increased conflict that result when some people are (or feel) excluded."  DOD, *Decision Paper #6: Diversity Leadership*, 6.

24.  This topic should be considered for future research.

25.  McCullough, "Female Engagement Teams…," *Defense Video & Imagery Distribution System*; U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School Web site, "About the Cultural Support Program."

26. Pellerin, "Dempsey: Allowing Women in Combat Strengthens Joint Force," *American Forces Press Service*.

27. DOD, *Population Representation in the Military Services: Summary* (2011), 2.

28. Liswood, *The Loudest Duck*, xx.

29. Ibid., xxvii.

30. Ibid., 1-2, 4, 82.

31. This 15-year average raises the question as to why overall female accession rates have hovered at the 24 percent mark (with many ups and downs). There should be further research on expanding the Air Force message to attract more women for the health of the force.

32. DOD, *Population Representation in the Military Services* (2011), D-20, 23.

33. AFD 121205-014, *United States Air Force Diversity Strategic Roadmap* (2012), 9, 14-15.

34. Samuels and Samuels, "Incorporating the Concept of Privilege into Policy and Practice," 322.

35. *Diversity Strategic Roadmap* (2012), 9-10.

36. AFD 101117-010. *United States Air Force Diversity Strategic Roadmap* (2010), 5, 7; Lane to the author, e-mail; Yourse, to the author, e-mail.

37. Samuels and Samuels, "Incorporating the Concept of Privilege into Policy and Practice," 322.

38. Ibid., 327.

39. The most recent example occurred when General Welsh, new Chief of Staff of the Air Force, issued an edict to conduct "health and welfare" checks in December 2012 to ensure workspaces reflected a professional workspace. These were depicted as a "witch hunt" against the fighter pilot culture; General Welsh countered vehemently, stating certain traditions had no place in today's Air Force. Nevertheless, discussions regarding witch hunts are still alive in the blogosphere and in workspaces. "CSAF Jan Letter to Airmen."

40. AFI 36-7001, *Diversity*, 4.

41. In discussing the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Samuels and Packard stated in February 2012 that "Our Oath of Office demands that we support our nation's laws; thus, under repeal, toleration is the minimum behavioral expectation of every service member. However, military strength is not built on toleration. Strength requires acceptance and, ultimately, respect and inclusiveness for all who volunteer to serve. We must value our colleagues for who they are and not who we want them to be." Samuels and Packard, "Repeal of DADT Makes the Military Stronger," *Air Force Times*, 24; Dr. Steven Samuels (USAFA Professor Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership), interview by the author, 17 November 2012.

42. *Air Force Diversity Strategic Roadmap* (2012), 14.

43. Lt Col John Yourse (Headquarters Air Force Global Diversity Division), interview by the author, 5 November 2012.

44. From the CCL, this model is "a research-based, time-tested guideline for developing managers proposes engaging them with three clusters of experience, using a 70-20-10 ratio: challenging assignments (70%), developmental relationships (20%), and coursework and training (10%). Despite the popularity of the 70-20-10 rule, most organizations are still not systematic or intentional about using a synergistic combination of assignments- relationships-coursework to groom future leaders." Princeton University Office of Human Resources Web site; Wilson et al, *Grooming Top Leaders*, 4.

45. Dr Fil J. Arenas (Associate Professor, Organizational Leadership Studies, Squadron Officer College), interviews by the author, 11 October 2012 and 14 December 2012.

46. See appendix B for more information.

47. *Air Force Diversity Strategic Roadmap* (2012), 14.

48. The mentoring programs can be found on the MyEDP, MyODP or MyCDP, via the Air Force Portals. A 2009 Airman's Roll Call promised that AFI 36-3401, *Air Force Mentoring*, dated from 2000 would be revised by 1 October 2009 but this has yet to occur. AFD 090421-061, *Air Force Mentoring*.

49. Shoemaker and Park, *Women in Peace & Security Careers*, 4.

50. Full disclosure: the author is a board member of AcademyWomen, the sponsoring vehicle. AcademyWomen also sponsors e-Mentoring leadership programs for female cadets and midshipmen, male and female veterans, and military spouses.

51. These individuals meet virtually, via phone/e-mail/Skype or in person. At this time the program is mostly restricted to women mentoring women with some inclusion of senior male mentors (O-4 commanders and above). "Our eMentor Programs," e-mentoring Leadership Program Web site; Goebel to the author, e-mail, 27 November 2012.

52. *NavyWomen eMentor Leadership Program: Year 3*, 8.

53. When extrapolated to the entire population of program participants the 12 individuals who stated in the survey that the program "positively impacted their decision to remain in uniform" represents 60 program participants. Retaining these 60 members would translate to a total of 4.35 million dollar return on investment (the program cost approximately 200,000 dollars) when one considers replacement costs such as recruitment and training. *NavyWomen eMentor Leadership Program: Year 3*, 22, 27; Goebel to the author, e-mail, 29 January 2013.

54. *Air Force Diversity Strategic Roadmap* (2010), 14.

55. Liswood, *The Loudest Duck*, 27.

56. *Air Force Diversity Strategic Roadmap* (2012), 15.

57. The Air Force Diversity Committee formed in December 2010; there is a quarterly session is co-chaired by the Secretary of the Air Force and Chief of the Air Force's human resources staffs to "offer advice on major diversity policy issues and long-term strategic oversight and perspectives." Also, a Chief Diversity Officer was hired at the US Air Force Academy in early 2011. Moreover, there have been several surveys conducted or planned, to include an Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) Career Decision Survey in November 2011 to better understand why individuals leave/remain in the Air Force (results are still pending) and a planned joint Air Force Public Affairs and AFPC survey to understand the specific issue of women retention. Finally, in 2012, official guidance was issued in AFI 36-7001 *Diversity* and AFI 1-1, *Air Force Culture* were both issued in summer 2012. Lane to the author, e-mail.

58. *Air Force Diversity Strategic Roadmap* (2012), 15.

59. Air Force leaders should constantly remain vigilant to the problem-set of increasing diversity, as resting on one's laurels could trigger inadvertent back-sliding. Lt Col John Yourse (Headquarters Air Force Global Diversity Division), interview by the author, 5 November 2012.

60. Samuels and Samuels, "Incorporating the Concept of Privilege into Policy and Practice," 323.

61. Lieutenant Colonel DiSilverio addressed three policy recommendations to include values identified by women, in her 2002 Air War College paper *Winning the Retention Wars*.

62. DiSilverio, *Winning the Retention Wars*, 42.

63. GAO-01-841, *Military Personnel: Longer Time Between Moves*, 2, 17.

64. Holmes, "Slowing PCS Fewer Moves Will Save Millions," *Air Force Times*.

65. According to DiSilverio, "of 3,795 officers completing a 1999 AFPC survey about home basing, 83 percent overwhelmingly liked the concept. The majority of personnel (76 percent of officers) would want to remain at a home-base location for 5–12 years." DiSilverio, *Winning the Retention Wars*, 42-44.

66. AFI 36-2110, *Personnel Assignments*, 343.

67. DiSilverio, *Winning the Retention Wars*, 45.

68. Ibid, 45-47.

69. *Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009*, sec. 533(a).

70. Ibid., sec. 533(c).

71. *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012*, sec. 531.

72. Specifically, the Navy stated that "during the period of inactive duty in the IRR, the member is provided full active duty TRICARE health benefits for themselves and their dependents, a monthly stipend of 2 times 1/30th of their basic pay, and a one-time move to a CONUS location of their choice for the duration of their participation in the pilot program. All program participants will return to active duty at the end of the period prescribed and will incur a two-month for every one-month of program participation obligated service (OBLISERVE) in addition to any existing OBLISERVE owed to the Navy." NAVADMIN 089/12, "Career Intermission Pilot Program Extension."

73. The Coast Guard program is open to men and women, officers and enlisted; individuals can leave twice during their career, for 24 months at a time, without pay. These individuals choose either to affiliate with the reserves or not affiliate, and returning to duty is a rather straight-forward process. Initially a once-in-a-career opportunity, it was modified in 2009 to be available twice in a career. ALCOAST 299/09, "Update to Temporary Separation and Care of Newborn Children Policy;" *COMDTINST M1000.4: Military Separations*, 1-177-1-179.

74. About 407 USCG officers (7.4 percent of the force) separate each year, and of these, about 125 are eligible for TEMPSEP (30.7 percent), of which 59 individuals (47.2 percent) took part. The return rates for this program have not been high thus far (about 17% of about 44 officer participants), nor have the promotion rates but the USCG remains dedicated as even a small return rate is a way to retain quality individuals. TempSepStats Excel Spreadsheet, Acree to the author, e-mail, 23 October 2012.

75. Lt Col John Yourse (Headquarters Air Force Global Diversity Division), interview by the author, 5 November 2012.

76. DiSilverio, *Winning the Retention Wars*, 49.

77. Donley, "Rebalancing the Total Force."

78. *The United States Army Reserve 2012 Posture Statement*, iii.

79. Ibid., 13.

80. Unconscious bias, or "mind bugs," may influence the judgment of even the most well-intentioned officers. As Shepard stated, "the intellect is completely powerless" when it comes to the fact that "unconscious judgments, may often be in error" in dealing with diversity. Ireland, "Mahzarin Banaji Looks at Biology of Bias."

81. Harvard University Web site, "Project Implicit."

82. Stanford Graduate School of Business Web site, "Bringing Leadership Lessons to the Classroom...and the Boardroom."

83. Part of developing competency is ensuring that leaders are gender-neutral when it comes to selecting individuals for certain positions. There is a powerful example of this succeeding in the civilian world. For several decades now, orchestra audition panels have gone to great lengths to overcome gender bias. Panels considering future orchestra players will do so without initially seeing the candidates. They will go to such lengths as having men escort women candidates, so the candidate sounds like a man walking. Having leveled the playing field, the panel focuses solely on the music quality. Per the study, "estimates based on the roster sample indicate that blind auditions may account for 25 percent of the increase in the percentage of orchestra musicians who are female." Goldin and Rouse, "Orchestrating Impartiality…," *The American Economic Review*.

84. Lane to author, e-mail.

85. *Air Force Diversity Strategic Roadmap* (2012), 14.

86. Dr. Fil J. Arenas (Associate Professor, Organizational Leadership Studies, Squadron Officer College), interview by the author, 11 October 2012.

87. The "January 2012 Internal Communication Assessment Group Diversity Survey of Airmen [revealed that]: 86% believe the Air Force is doing a good/excellent job creating diversity throughout the Total Force; 75% agree that it is important for the Air Force to attract, recruit, develop and retain a diverse workforce; 61% think Air Force senior leaders are committed to improving diversity" The surveys do not demonstrate how the questions were framed but more telling of the author's personal experience are the following statistics: "61% have not read or heard diversity initiatives discussed by senior leaders; 40% understand the Air Force definition of diversity." AFD 120716-024, *US Air Force Key Talking Points June 2012 Special Edition: Diversity*.

88. Many thanks to Kimberly Streeter for this idea.

89. Samuels and Samuels, "Incorporating the Concept of Privilege into Policy and Practice," 323.

90. *Air Force Diversity Strategic Roadmap* (2012), 14.

91. Dr. Charles Nath III (Holm Center Director of Curriculum), interview by the author, 19 October 2012.

92. The 2009 USAFA Diversity Plan aims to "expand the diversity of the USAFA cadet wing to better educate and train future officers expected to serve a diverse and expeditionary force." AFD-110316-012 *USAFA Diversity Plan*, 2-3, 14.

93. Dr. Adis Vila (USAFA Chief Diversity Officer), interview by the author, 27 November 2012.

94. Branum, "Interactive Theater Encourages Checking 'Diversity Filters.'"

95. Samuels to author, e-mail.

96. Dr. Adis Vila (USAFA Chief Diversity Officer), interview by the author, 27 November 2012.

97. Dr Fil J. Arenas (Associate Professor, Organizational Leadership Studies, Squadron Officer College), interview by the author, 11 October 2012.

98. Dr. Mary N. Hampton (Associate Dean for Academics ACSC/DEA), interview by the author, 1 November 2012.

99. COL (USA, ret.) Gene Kamena (Air War College Department of Leadership and Warfighting Deputy Department Chair), interview by the author, 5 November 2012.

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